

VZCZCXRO4398  
PP RUEHDBU  
DE RUEHDBU #0834/01 1241649  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 041649Z MAY 06  
FM AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7418  
INFO RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC  
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE  
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 1596  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1603  
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 1575  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 1572  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 1527  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1529  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1519  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 1400  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1346  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC  
RHMFISS/HQ USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 1561  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1132  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 1597  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY 0919  
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 8644

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 DUSHANBE 000834

SIPDIS

SIPDIS  
SENSITIVE  
STATE FOR SCA/CEN, DRL/IRF, S/P

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [TI](#)

SUBJECT: TAJIKISTAN'S RELIGIOUS LEADERS REACT TO DRAFT LAW ON RELIGION

REF: DUSHANBE 0541

11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Please handle accordingly. Not for public Internet.

12. (U) SUMMARY: In a series of meetings with PolOff April 12-25, religious leaders unanimously expressed grave concerns with the State Committee on Religious Affairs' (SCRA) new draft law on religion. Most are optimistic the draft law will not pass this year, if at all. Christian organizations have united and sent a letter to President Rahmonov and SCRA Chairman Murudullo Davlatov delineating specific concerns with the draft law that would limit their freedom-of-religion rights. Islamic organizations have not responded publicly to the draft law. END SUMMARY.

CHRISTIAN GROUPS WRITE TO PRESIDENT

13. (SBU) On April 20, 34 Christian organizations sent a letter to President Rahmonov and SCRA Chairman Davlatov. The letters to President Rahmonov stressed the concern that implementing the new law will discredit Tajikistan in the international community and violate the Tajik Constitution and international agreements Tajikistan has signed. Attached to the letter are a point-by-point analysis drafted by the Christian organizations, and a legal analysis by the Republic Bureau on Human Rights and Observation of Legitimacy.

14. (SBU) The analyses point out the restrictive nature of the law, which would prohibit many religious groups to worship (reftel). The overarching concern raised by the Christian organizations is the vague nature of the law and further questions it raises. The organizations' analysis also points out the first line of the draft states, "[Republic of Tajikistan] acknowledges a special role of Islam in social and

spiritual life of people of Tajikistan~." Although most have interpreted the restrictive articles in the draft law to mean greater restrictions on Islam in an attempt by the government to curb extremism and Islam's growing popularity, the non-Islamic organizations fear this line means Islam would be given priority over other religions. They want to revise the phrase to reflect equality of all religions in a secular state.

#### DEALING WITH DAVLATOV

¶5. (SBU) The non-Islamic organizations submitted their analysis to SCRA Chairman Davlatov as well and requested additional meetings to discuss the draft law. Organizations point out that Davlatov has been a fickle person to meet with and did not take them seriously in past meetings. They complain that he likes to drone on in meetings about irrelevant issues and does not seek their true opinion. The only concern Davlatov wanted to hear was how the religious organizations defined certain words such as "association." (COMMENT: Although the organizations dismissed the importance of Davlatov's questions, a word's definition is crucial, and ambiguities in the law could give the government leeway to widely interpret the law. END COMMENT.)

¶6. (SBU) Davlatov's comments in the press dismissed the non-Islamic organizations' critique of the draft law saying that the organizations could not justify their claims that the new draft law violates articles of the Tajik constitution. When pressed on details of the draft law, Davlatov remarked that there is no need to discuss the law on a public level.

¶7. (SBU) The majority of religious leaders noted that up to this point they have enjoyed relative freedom to worship and engage in religious activities. They all cite good relationships with the previous chairmen of the SCRA. Many

DUSHANBE 00000834 002 OF 003

also specifically pointed out that Davlatov is difficult to engage with and is a staunch secularist.

¶8. (SBU) Since Davlatov's term began in 2005, registration has become more difficult. Although the SCRA never outright denies registration, it sometimes cites technical application errors to delay registration, an increasingly common Soviet-style tactic. Some organizations understand from government sources that more organizations will be registered after the new draft law passes.

¶9. (SBU) One organization alleged the SCRA sometimes refused to approve printing of spiritual literature and delayed the importation of copies of the New Testament. (COMMENT: The restriction of religious texts imports could be a result of bureaucratic red tape or corrupt practices in attempts to get bribes, rather than a concerted effort to limit freedom of religion. Humanitarian assistance has been similarly delayed. As the government increasingly cracks down on corruption, corrupt working level officials seem to be more desperately brazen. END COMMENT.)

#### ISLAMIC GROUPS SILENT ON DRAFT LAW

¶10. (SBU) Although the minority religious leaders PolOff met with all received a copy of the draft law, many Islamic leaders did not. When PolOff visited a local Friday mosque, the elders and leaders of the mosque told PolOff they had not seen the draft. After receiving a copy from PolOff, they expressed great surprise and disdain at the new draft law. Many local imams received copies of the draft law through informal connections, rather than directly from the government. The Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) Deputy Chairman, who is also a member of Lower House of Parliament, also received a copy from the Embassy. (COMMENT: This shows the government has selectively distributed the draft, and may have made a concerted effort not to spread too widely to the Islamic community. END COMMENT.)

¶11. (SBU) The Imam of the Central Mosque in Dushanbe claimed he

had not read or seen the draft law. He initially praised the government and said they have not had any problems with the government, but after PolOff pointed out some details of the draft law, the Imam said he hopes the draft law will not pass. Embassy sources tell PolOff that the Council of Ulamo, which directs the Central Mosque, has indeed received a copy of the draft law and are also dissatisfied with it, but have not come out publicly against the draft. Although it is supposed to be an independent board of Islamic elders, the Council of Ulamo is heavily influenced by the government.

¶12. (SBU) Although speaking out against the draft law would be difficult, Council members told Embassy sources, they do not favor the law. One main reason is because the state has taken control of managing the hajj. The profits government officials reap from bribes and registration fees from the hajj means that the Council of Ulamo would benefit less from the hajj.

¶13. (SBU) Even the head of the Russian Orthodox Church agreed that the hajj should be managed by religious organizations and not the government. Although he does not feel the Russian Orthodox Church would be affected by the new law, as many of the articles are in fact targeted against Islam, he understands the new law would negatively impact the Islamic community. However, he cautioned that religious groups should not protest too much and anger the government. Leaders of Christian groups have attempted to contact Islamic leaders, but sensed a lack of interest on their part on cooperating as an ad hoc coalition.

DUSHANBE 00000834 003 OF 003

¶14. (SBU) COMMENT: Given the Council of Ulamo's relationship with the government, it is unlikely Islamic groups will unite in a coalition with Christian organizations to make public statements questioning the government. Nevertheless, a number of organizations are being proactive to voice their concerns to the government. In the middle of May, the OSCE in Dushanbe will hold a roundtable to discuss the draft law and present its analysis of the draft. This will alert the government that the international community is watching closely. At this time, we judge it unlikely that, with all this attention, the draft law will pass as is. END COMMENT.  
HOAGLAND